

Measure



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RENSSELAER, IN 47978

2001-02 Edition

The Literary Magazine of Saint Joseph's College



Measure
2001-02 Edition

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Publisher
Dr. Ernest R. Mills, III

Printer
Faulstich Printing Company

Cover Art: Spanish Mission by *Brienne Hopkins*

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I Am an American Woman

Gwyn Skrobul

I am an American woman.

I have tried on Supermom's cape
and found it fit too tightly
choking my need to be me.

I have read parenting books, self-help books,
checkbooksreportcardsrecipecards
USNews, Reader'sDigest, and Cosmo.

I have sat in the rain at soccer games
in the dark and cried
in church and prayed
in my office and died.

I am *me* mom *me* wife *me* daughter *me* teacher *me*.

I am one.

Breain Ma'Ayteh
(Imitation of Charles Simic's "Charles Simic")

Breain Ma'Ayteh

Breain Ma'Ayteh is a desk.
A desk has legs and heavy loads to bear.

Is she a desk with a cracked surface?
It depends how long she has been standing.
It depends on the weight of her computer.

For whom was the desk made?
It was made for yours truly, Breain Ma'Ayteh.

What will the desk hold?
A spiral, a bottle of Vivarin and frustration, to name a few.

What is the purpose of the desk?
Its goal, friends, will be found through the etchings
on its surface.

Who made the desk?
A student, a Catholic,
a woman who is the contradiction of both.

Where will the desk go?
Wherever the legs wish to take it.

The Anatomy of Presumption

Mark Seely

I was sitting on the brick steps in the courtyard with my face against the raspy evening breeze that had only recently begun to file away the rough edges of the late afternoon heat. The band was good—the female singer had a voice like grape jelly. A small child was bouncing up and down in his stroller across the way, his head bobbing back and forth, a cherub grin stuck to the front of his face. His grin was contagious and I felt the corners of my own lips become light.

But something wasn't right.

There was something unnatural about the way the child was sitting, I thought. There was something missing. His leg—oh my God! He has only one leg!

A cold shiver needled its way down my back.

I looked at the place where his left leg should be. I felt uncomfortable gawking, so I tried to take it in with a series of glances carefully calculated to appear random to any observer. It was hideous—a stub extending all the way to what would be a knee. I wondered if it had been severed in an automobile accident. Maybe it was a birth defect. His leg looked not unlike the misshapen limb of a thalidamide baby in a black and white photo from the fifties, from the days when human discomfort was thought to be entirely curable. Perhaps his mother had been exposed to a modern industrial teratogen, a chemical “monster-maker,” the sweaty residue of man's triumph over nature. Then I thought of Kendra, my own daughter, whose death remains a mystery. I have always wondered whether her daily absence in my life might be the result of exposure to some environmental toxin—perhaps something the neighbor sprayed on his yard.

The arrogant bastard!

Almost daily he would inject noxious compounds into his lawn in a never-ending battle with the natural order of things—a battle to maintain his pristine green facade. No weeds dared to offend his republican patch of crewcut with their wild anarchism, with their matted dreadlocks. Within his borders, manicured sod and bark-covered beds were a manifest destiny that stifled all indigenuous expression.

My yard was a reservation.

I used to laugh at him behind his back. And occasionally, on a day when the wind was blowing the right direction, I would stroll around my front yard and casually kick the full heads of ripe dandelions, sending feathery messengers of life adrift through the fence.

I used to laugh. But now I hate him and everything he stands for: the conceit of the human race. Had my daughter been a victim of his misapplied vanity? I have no way of knowing, but believing it possible allows me to feel anger, and sometimes anger can mask the pain of loss.

Soon, despite the music, the cool breeze, and the otherwise beautiful evening, my mood began to sour, and a coppery bitterness rose in the back of my throat.

Then, as I took a rather extended look at the child with the leg-less smile, his father, whose hands were rhythmically tapping the plastic cane-shaped handles of the stroller, turned my direction. Our eyes met. My chest froze in shame. He caught me gaping at his disfigured son. What must it be like to have a child who is so visibly different? The curious stares, the horrified, pitying looks, the whispers of old women. I tried to force a smile, but I have no idea what kind of expression—if any—found its way to the surface. The father glanced away, indifferent. But I knew his thoughts. Our world has no patience for deviance, for those who are tinted with a nonstandard pigment, for those who, because of a few careless strokes, are made to stand out from the background wash of bland normality, warped through foreshortening, foregrounded by something as trivial as a misshapen limb. And I was caught holding the cruel brush in my hand.

Just then the child with the missing leg leaned so far to his right that I thought he would fall out of his perch and, to my astonishment, pulled his left leg, the fully-formed leg he had been sitting on the whole time, out from under his body and flopped it down along side his other one, both legs now kicking furiously with the music.

Mystery

Megan Taylor

Star of ages
Life in pages
Cradle under broken tree
Virgin's son
Chosen one
Heal the bleeding misery
Callused hands
King of man
Boy inside a temple
 preach
Telling stories
Hiding glory
Revealed on mountainside
 to teach
Sinner's friend
Evil's end
No temptations touch the
 soul
Sickness vanished
Satan banished
Peace to make our spirit
 whole

Endless light
Righteous fight
Agony in sword and stone
Betrayed by brothers
Cursed by others
Changed the world without a
 throne
Sword impales
Hands bear nails
The raving crowd to seal his
 fate
Cup drained dry
In love-stained eyes
Father opens arms to wait
Backs still turned
Salvation earned
Grows musty in the teeming
 days
We hold him down
In wrongful crown
As he dies daily in our ways.



Brother

Mary Bradshaw

Imagination...

Sara Post

Imagination. . .
Used to make us unstoppable,
Running free
With the bare legs of childhood
We colored our carefree and unbound world
With a vividness of innocence.
Impossibilities
Were shattered by youthful eagerness,
But growth brought reality as empty as death.
The prison
Of cycled knowledge walled out freedom,
Now we cannot get past black and white. Such a
 simple ability,
A simple gift,
Fades in a grown up world.

Necessity
(Parody of Alan Dugan's "Prayer")

Tina Carroll

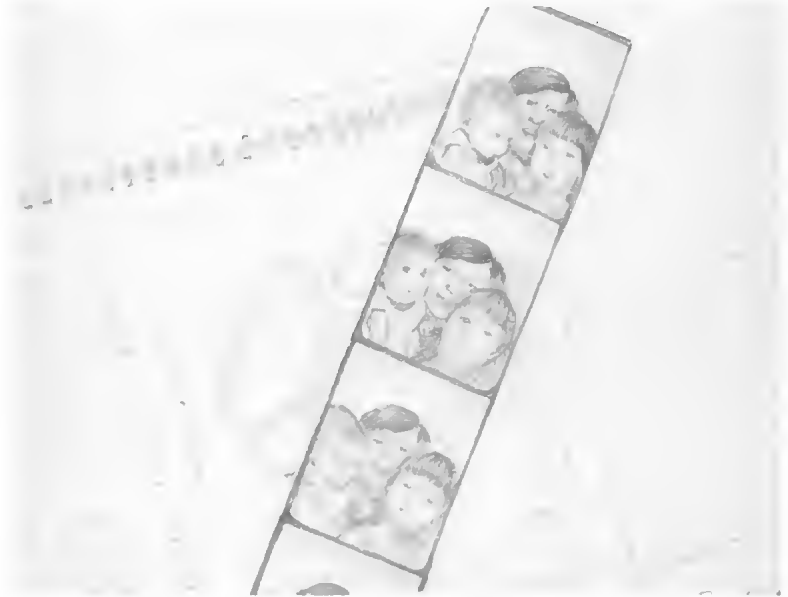
God, I need a man because I need love.
My friends will be jealous if I have a man,
Who spoils me with flowers, kisses and affection!
But if I have no man, I feel ugly and crabby all day,
My weekends are boring and I feel alone.
But when I'm dating, Oh, I have one helluva time!
He treats me like a princess and all the guys wonder what
they're missing.

I feel special, almost debonair.
I am a hot commodity, so take notice.
The gifts come pouring in and I'm invited to parties, except I
Cannot talk to other guys and
I have to hold his sweaty palms all night.
I smile and nod, as if not me, but me and him.
Soon the thrill is gone
And I miss being just me and having my space.
I miss flirting and searching
For the "man of my dreams." So I decide to lose the guy,
Have some juicy gossip about the nasty breakup
For a few days, and then go back to being miserable.
I think, "Who needs a man anyway?" I do.

Forgotten

Julia A. Hahn

One day she decided to die
and having neither strength nor guts enough
to finish the job, she became one of
the walking dead—
passing the days from her coffin of a body,
dressed in black to mourn the loss of herself.
As with any death, people believed they
saw her everywhere,
but she was never really there;
just a shadow in the corner or a
false glimpse in the crowd.
She played the widow to her own soul,
crying herself to sleep while
watching the world move on and
push her to the back of its collective mind,
until she determined that she too should
stop grieving
and grant herself the peaceful rest
that comes with being forgotten.



Memories

Sarah Chalik

Violins and Some Oboes

Mark Seely

Smetana's river
Flows through the living room
From a recording studio
Somewhere in Czechoslovakia
When it was still called by that name.

I am caught in one of the eddies—
Violins and some oboes—
And drift in slow circles
Feeling a little seasick
But only for a moment until the river calms.

The woman on the phone
Told me that I have been selected
For a special appreciation gift;
Out of all of the customers that use their service
My name came to the top.

I said "thank you"
And asked her if she knew
Where the Moldau River was
And if she thought a person might float down it
On an inner tube in the summer.

She seemed confused
And asked if I would like to try their new
 guaranteed special
For thirty days
With no obligation
As part of my good fortune to have been chosen.

“But the river?”
I asked her again what she thought
About the inner tube idea—
In the summer of course
When the water was warm and friendly.

She said that she didn't know
But that I was passing up a golden opportunity
And that not everyone is chosen
And there was, after all, no obligation
And the thirty days were absolutely free.

“I think it's near Germany,” I said
But she hung up the phone
Before I could tell her about Smetana
And the way that the violins and some oboes
Make me a little seasick sometimes.



Christmas Scene 2

Mary Bradshaw

The Colors of You

Bridget Newman

Red

The color of Love
The mood of passion
The shade of my cheeks, when
Out of the corner of my eye
I catch you looking my way

Orange

The glow of summer
The days that never seemed
To fade into night

Sunsets

I shared with you

Yellow

The pale moon
Shining down on destined Love

Illuminating

Dreamy eyes

Gentle smiles

Green

The grass we layed in
As we looked upon the stars

The subtle tones

Forest and sea

In your eyes

Blue

The skies that canopied

Our blossoming Love

The subtle tones

Ocean and grey

In my eyes

Purple

The dress I wore

That night

The night you told me you loved me

For the first time

Violet, lavender

Remind me of your

Unfailing, unconditional

Love

Material Memory

Carla Luzadder

Perfectly clipped sections of life,
Someone's mother, someone's wife,
Picked these flowers, dots and stripes,
A piece of the past, in someone's life.

A pair of scissors, needles and thread,
Intricate patterns formed the spread.
Long days and nights of loving care,
A part of one's life, just lying there.

Unique and original, one of a kind,
A flawless design, tattered by time.
Piece by piece, she made this quilt.
A labor of love was what she built.

What was she like, this mother and wife,
Strong and tan from a farmer's life,
Young and bold or frail and old?
Imagine the stories she could have told.

Transitioning

Susan Kramer

stand with me in the teasing water
bring me closer, take me farther
i don't care if this is wrong
i've held back for far too long
faded dreams written into stone
maybe more or less than i've been shown
stop the waves, i wanna see
what time looks like over me
i wish the sun would hold its pose
and whisper secrets no one knows
i'm not sure just when i faded
but the light has beautifully invaded
broke my silence, split my ears
i've ignored this wonderment for years
the mystery that explains so much
i want to be known, i want to be touched
pull the blanket of stars over me
hide my face so no one can see
i am blind, i am wasted
this is the best night i ever tasted

What Have You Done?

Tim Hayes

What have you done?
Does this life have meaning?
The undying love
Written for two
In the sky above

Have you felt like someone without emotion?
Did the world close in all around you?
Can you begin to understand
The things not said.

Does being fake mean living?
Being yourself truly to what extent?
Do crimes committed act as mirror images?
What all have you done?

The nice smile you give to someone
The congratulations when good news is heard
The intelligent saying written on the wall
The important people that make the day

The ones that say "hello"
Filling your heart with happy feelings
Standing by as the earth spins
You accomplish some things.

But what really have you done?
Is the door always revolving?
Are people smart?
What all have you done today?

Did you remember to say I love you to someone special?
Did you do things today you will regret?
Did you do anything today?
Did the simple things mean anything?

The warmth of your character
Seems to glow with ease
The concrete structure
Stands up to you.

The good things done for others
Always coming back to you
The anger subsides
Feelings rise to the level of great potential.

Does living each day make you better?
Does being a better person help?
Do people cry because you are not there?
What all have you done?

For Christine

Megan Taylor

The stolid one
sitting patiently through family fights
under the shadow of the sister
who always hogged the sunlight
now commanding attention from the world
that is your blank canvas to decorate
you always saw life with more joy than I did
and things more trivial against my obsession
from you, learning courage and tolerance
from me, learning what not to do
but we stand together as we always have
sometimes gritting our teeth
but always loving
your eyes showed me pain, strength,
determination, doubt
and you never saw you how I saw you
beautiful, enduring, wise, stubborn
my best friend
my dramatic foil, but my copy
hacking through life with a sword of passion
searching for someone, something, to call your own
how I wish you could have seen it inside yourself
the way I could
clear, bright, unique
unmatched
I wish you could understand
just how much the jokes, the secrets, the experiences
keep me alive
how my pride and confidence in you swell
how a thought of you makes me smile
you are a star
among so many others
but I see you first, and I wish on you
and always will.



Christmas Scene

Mary Bradshaw

Walking Down the Street on a Busy Afternoon

Breain Ma'Ayteh

I
walk down the streets of Chicago,
the wind in my hair, a Rolex
on my wrist
and impatience
in my footsteps.
I'm
almost late for my palm reading, and
Sonia only takes clients on time.

I
see him at the corner of Rush and Michigan,
holding his cup in one hand,
gripping his wheelchair
with the other.
He has a dirty face and only
seven fingers,
and two of his teeth are stained,
like tar.

From the looks of
his camouflage coat,
his past was
a bloody one.

" 'Afternoon, ma'am.
Spare a dollar?"

You know the routine,
same ole thing, just keep
walking.

Keep going,
maybe he won't look at you.

He won't notice your
leather coat,
he won't stare at your
tailored slacks.

"God bless you, ma'am."

Don't look,
don't look,
you've almost done it,
why did he say that
when
I
didn't even give him the godddam dollar?!,
there you go,
atta girl!

I
see the sign for Sonia's
and force myself
not to look back, so that

I
won't notice
that man's
eyes
on

my

guilty

shape.

The Diner

Julia A. Hahn

Soggy fries
blanketed in a solid
form of grease
they call cheese
and a bowl of curdling gravy;

bitter coffee,
too hot when poured,
but always cold at
the bottom
kinda like my night.

The Mexican busboy
and the oriental waitress
sit at the bar, exhausted,
carelessly avoiding
the full tables

of hungover kids
back from the city clubs
and migrants relaxing after
long shifts
in the factories
and kitchens

all waiting
for more coffee
and creamer
a fresh ashtray
a reason to go home.

The air grows heavy
with the night's adventures
and the next day's plans;
with many languages
and heavy accents;

with the clouds
of smoke above each table
that spread and grow together
like that unmistakable smog
on the horizon.

We stay at our table
until conversation or eyelids
fail us, returning home
to face our day
and await our return to the diner.

Man Hands

Angela Williams

Those hands,
My man's hard hands,
Sturdy and strong
Built to lift, hold, carry,
Steady a fall.
Strong enough to survive,
But still soft to the touch
And tender enough to
love.



Playground

Sarah Chalik

Afternoons and Porch Swings

Annie Domasica

Marley's family moved into the neighborhood when she was nine years old. Most of the kids who lived there had lived there their entire lives, or at least for as long as they could remember. For them, Wanda was just a part of the neighborhood. They never wondered about her, or took the time to get to know her. Everyone just sort of accepted her, the same way they accepted that Mr. Crowley was always going to spend the third weekend of every seasonable month trimming his lawn with shears, and that the Trovingers' blue truck would never move from their driveway.

Right away, Marley took an interest in Wanda. While the kids were riding up and down the old woman's driveway, Marley followed, but stopped in front of her porch every now and again to look at her. After a while, Wanda started looking back. She'd raise her glass of tea at Marley, as if to propose a toast, and Marley could hear the ice hit the sides of the glass.

After a few days of this, Marley came closer. Wanda raised her glass and put her cigarette down in the ashtray at her feet. Marley smiled. Wanda smiled back. She moved over on her swing, and looked over to the empty space beside her with a wink. Marley got off her bike. Wanda put out her cigarette.

"And who are you, young lady?"

"Marley." She was still young enough to be shy and a little bit afraid.

"Who?"

"Mar-ley."

"Marley. Ahhhh," and something in her throat gargled as she made the sound so that she had to clear her throat before she began again.

"Why aren't you with the other kids?"

"I dunno."

"Yes, you do." Marley didn't know how to answer, and even if she did, she wouldn't tell this old lady anyway.

"You don't like the girls, huh?"

She didn't really. Marley didn't play with dolls.

"No."

"Don't like the boys either?"

"No, they're fun. I just," she trailed off as she scuffed the bottoms of her red tennis shoes against the cement porch.

"Well, finish Marley. Don't expect me to guess your thoughts!"

Silence.

"You'd rather find out what old Wanda is all about, eh?"

"Yeah." And Marley smiled. And Wanda laughed and patted her knee.

"Would you like some tea?"

She wore a bright green dress that folded and wrinkled across the rolls in her stomach, and crawled up her thighs, and rested comfortably on the shelf made by her behind. Her shoes were white and didn't quite fit so that her feet spilled out the sides of them. Wanda smelled like a mixture of a grandmother and a little brother – too much perfume, a failing attempt to mask the scent of cigarettes, and the smell of the wind in the springtime. The smell wasn't offensive, but it was interesting, and it was a while before it became familiar and comforting.

She made a noise when she got up out of her favorite seat; a sort of grunting and low moaning that Marley guessed was a result of pain. Wanda was an older woman, but Marley couldn't ever guess exactly how old she might be – she just knew that she was old. Her eyes were kind, a gentle gray with a bit of blue. She always seemed to have tears in her eyes, but no one ever actually saw her crying.

When she talked, she was loud. When she laughed, she was even louder. She laughed until the phlegm came up from her lungs and got caught in her throat, and then she coughed

until Marley thought she would die. After the fit, with her eyes filled with tears, Wanda would light another cigarette.

She was often seen on the porch swing outside of her little yellow brick house, never without her tabloid magazine, a glass of iced tea, and a pack of cigarettes. She waved to anyone who passed her on foot, by car, or on bicycle. She had hour conversations with the mail carrier, and threw treats to any dog that was lucky enough to walk by her house.

She lived alone and was as much a part of the structure of the neighborhood as the houses that lined the street. She had no job, but seemed to live comfortably, with no real financial burden. From the kids' calculations she was living well—in other words, they knew that she tipped her paperboy generously, had pizzas delivered every Thursday night, and always bought from them when they came peddling products for school fundraisers.

Wanda was the kind of person you wanted to hug, but were afraid to. The kids held their breath as she pulled them closer into her, and soon their faces were buried in her chest. There was absolutely nowhere to go, and sooner or later, after a few times of this—they started to like it.

"I need a hug." It was a fall day, and Marley ventured over to Wanda's porch shortly after she got home from school.

"You need a jacket."

"Wanda..." she whined as she swallowed the lump in her throat that always brought the tears.

"Well come here—what is wrong with you little girl?"

"I'm not!"

"What?"

"A little girl." And then she did start to cry. She plopped herself down on the swing. It swayed a little.

"Oh Marley," and Wanda hugged her tight and kissed her head. She rocked the swing gently with her feet, but Marley's feet dragged against the cement. She sobbed. It was twenty minutes before either of them spoke.

"Aren't you going to ask me what is the matter?"

"No," Wanda said, letting go.

"Well, why the hell not?" Wanda just stared straight ahead into the yard.

"Because you couldn't tell me even if you wanted to."

Silence. Then more tears.

"Well, why can't I? I don't even know why I'm crying anymore!" Wanda smiled.

"Because you're right. You're not really a little girl anymore."

The day of Marley's First Holy Communion, Wanda picked flowers from her garden and left them on her front porch with a card. She watched the party from across the street and waved as Marley stood on her porch reading her words. When she graduated from 8th grade, Wanda gave her a diary, wrapped in the Sunday comics. The first time Marley smoked a cigarette, Wanda knew.

"It's 5:30."

"So?"

"So-school gets out at ten after 3, and rehearsal runs till 4:30, and school is ten minutes from here."

"So?" She was fifteen years old now, and her voice was empty that afternoon.

"So, what were you doing?"

"When?"

"From 4:40 until now?"

"Hanging out."

"Where?"

"Whoa. Hey Wanda. Last time I checked, I had a mother—and she's not on this porch, and she's not at home—so let's not worry about it."

Though the comment sliced directly through the Old Woman's heart, she did not hesitate in her response.

"Right. So when does your mother get home so I can remind her to punish you for smoking?"

Marley stopped. Wanda smirked and raised her eyebrows.

"Sit down."

"I didn't..."

"Don't you dare lie to me Marley girl." But she didn't say it like a mother. In fact, she was almost laughing.

With her raspy voice and fits of coughing, cigarette in hand, she warned the young girl, who was becoming a young woman, of the dangers of smoking. Marley listened, and though she's had cigarettes since, she never forgot Wanda's plea. She will never be addicted.

On the day of her senior prom, Wanda watched from her porch swing as the kids took pictures in her front yard. And that night, when Marley's date dropped her off, Wanda's porch light went off as he kissed Marley goodnight.

"I saw him kiss you goodnight last night."

"Yeah."

"Yeah," she mocked back at her. "What's that all about?"

"What?"

"Kissing. Kissing boys, in the middle of the night, on your porch, with your tongue?"

"Why did you stay up so late?"

"Wanted to make sure you got in safely."

"Wanted to see if he'd kiss me!"

"So. What does that mean?"

"What? That we kissed?"

"Yeah."

"I dunno."

"Yes you do. Did you have fun?"

"Yeah, it was good. We had a really good night."

"Yeah...I never went—to a prom."

"You didn't?"

She shook her head.

"Why didn't you go? Every girl should go."

"Oh Marley, every girl should go—but only girls as beautiful as you actually get to go."

"But you're beautiful." It was a lie. They both knew it.

"Do you want some more tea?"

"No, I'm good. Do you? I'll get you some more if you want."

"No, I'm okay too."

A pause.

"Do you regret it? Not going?"

"Going where?"

"To the prom."

"Oh. I don't hardly think about that anymore. It's just one of those things I never got to do."

"It didn't really matter you know. It didn't change my life or anything."

"It wasn't magical?"

"For about 12 seconds...then it was just another night."

"I do though-wish I would have gone."

"Yeah..."

"Wish I would have gotten married, had kids, gone to college. I wish a lot of things. There's so much I never did. I know a lot about this yard, this street, these kids—but I don't know much about much else. Never seen a mountain, never swam in the ocean..." she trailed off, shaking her head.

The morning of her graduation from high school, Wanda put on her favorite green dress and walked to the school. She stood quietly in the back of the auditorium and disappeared soon after Marley received her diploma. When she left for college, she gave her a Bible—Wanda said that was all she'd ever really need. She wrote letters every week, and Marley's birthday never passed without a card.

On holidays and breaks, the women spent hours on her porch swing, sipping iced tea or hot chocolate—depending on the weather. Sometimes they talked, sometimes they didn't. Wanda and Marley watched the kids riding bikes in her driveway; they talked to the mail carrier when he came through. When Marley graduated from college, Wanda gave her an iced tea pitcher—one of the old fashioned ones that sat out in the sun. Marley moved out of her house that summer, and off that street. Still, not a visit to her parents passed without an evening spent on the porch swing at Wanda's.

"Hi Baby Girl!"

"Hey Old Lady! How's life?"

Wanda looked different now, older. Marley did too. She was a visitor now, no longer a part of the neighborhood.

"Beautiful. Life is beautiful. Mail came late today though. Mailman's wife is sick."

Marley never knew how to answer that.

"Wanda. I need to talk to you."

"What's the matter Marley? Are you in trouble? Do you need money?"

"No. Nothing like that. Not at all. Something good."

"Well, then wait a darn second. We need hot chocolate first!"

"No! You wait!" And Marley grabbed Wanda's hand with her left hand, catching Wanda's eye and then glancing down. Wanda's eyes followed to the glistening diamond. This time, there were real tears.

"Oh honey! When did he...? How did he...it's beautiful!"

"Hard to believe, huh?"

"Not so hard...I always knew someday..."

"Wish I would have known as soon as you did..."

They smiled and hugged, and Wanda served the hot chocolate with whipped cream and marshmallows that day.

Wanda came to her wedding, but didn't stay for the reception. "You get yourself a house with a porch swing," she said. "You never know who God might send to share it with you."

Wanda died one morning in the springtime. Marley took the day off to spend on her porch swing. She sipped tea and read the tabloids, and greeted the mail carrier when he came by.

Marley pushed gently against the familiar cement porch and swayed on the swing as she looked down and touched her pregnant belly.

"I wish she could have met you, Wanda."

She wondered what Wanda would have thought at that moment, knowing that Marley's baby—her miracle—was sharing their porch swing that afternoon.



Wood Road, North of Rensselaer

Nathan Plant

What Color's Your Carpet?

Rebecca Scherer

Shit, the alarm's beeping—time to get up.
I stretch, get out of bed, move forward and—
Fall. Flat on my face.
The alarm's still going. Gotta turn it off.
I crawl my way through the sea of obstacles
and hit the Off button.
The room is silent.
I turn on the desk lamp to see what I fell on.

Her.

Of course.
Why can't she just pick her shit up!
This is so annoying.
I don't know how much more I can stand.
Dirty clothes everywhere,
Clean clothes everywhere...
How can she tell the difference?
Half-eaten food
(seven steps to throw away what's uneaten)
and moldy dishes
(if it's green and fuzzy it's not good anymore!)
are her middle name.
I'm tired of cleaning up after her!
OK, I know I had this coming.
18 years
of putting my mom through hell
with my "pig sty mess" of a room.
But come on now!
The shoe's on the other foot,
and this is ridiculous!
I've learned my lesson.
"I don't wear makeup,"
she said.
She doesn't wear her makeup,
but she'll wear mine!

All I want for Christmas is ... a single.



Untitled

Mary Bradshaw

The Girl

Angela Williams

Tears are streaming down your face...are you okay?
What happened to make you so upset?
She wipes a tear from her cheek.
I don't know who I am. I used to know, used to care.
I had it all, had a plan, had a dream, had
a security of self.
I don't even have that anymore.
It didn't happen all at once. Piece by piece
I gave it all away,
slowly at first to where i didn't realize anything was gone.
Then it was a free for all, to the point where
i had very few pieces left.
I don't know if can can put those pieces back together...
don't know if i want to.

I became the person I swore I never would. I took pity on
people like me.

Ironic, huh? How life works, feeding you what you
thought you'd never have then watching you swallow it.

She becomes more angry than sad.
She looks down, then up quickly and screams..

"How did my life take such a misdirection?!"

She lashes out and punches the mirror in rage and begins
picking up the shattered pieces of her own reflection.

The Embarrassment of Eating a Sandwich

Breain Ma'Ayteh

Time for lunch.
As the other kids run to the cafeteria,
I lag behind,
my yellow jersey jacket draped over my arm,
shame stuffed deep in its pockets.

The smell of dying macaroni and cheese
takes an elevator straight to the top floor
of my taste buds.
Smiling faces complain about its texture,
their laughter is followed by swigs
of chocolate milk.

I sit alone in the corner, not alone, but viewed as another
piece of furniture.
I am not smiling.
I am not laughing.

My fingers fumble in my right pocket
for the bologna sandwich
I had hastily thrown
in there that morning before I left for school.
The other children's mothers had given them
a dollar for lunch money
and a kiss on the cheek. Mine had given me
an apologetic smile,
meat and mustard.

I slowly ripped off pieces of my sandwich,
sneaking them into my mouth
with a turn of my head.
Tears punch the insides of my eyelids.
My chest hurts, and my jacket remains squished
Between my frame and the wall.

Thirty-five minutes.
I "bump" into a garbage can
and lose the remnants
of my half-eaten sandwich.
Lunch is over.
Time for math.

Round the Clock

Melissa Genova

Shirley stood there with coffee in her hand,
staring at the tired old man in red plaid.
“You’re really cute, doll, can you sing me a song?”
He looked at her longingly, thinking nothing was wrong.
Shirley turned away, “Can I take your order please?”
She was tired of these men—they were like a disease.
Her short skirt brought in plenty of their stares;
The looks made her sick and brought on despair.
“It’s for the money,” she thought time and again.
And at her next table was another drunk man.
It was three A.M., she was tired as hell,
She explained to him it’s just food that they sell.
“Anything else I can get for you sir?”
“You’re number, cutie, maybe a little more?”
“Sorry,” she responded, and went on to say,
“You’re late. That special was yesterday.”

Not the First Time

Bridget Newman

I close my eyes.
I touch you softly, as if for the first time.
But I've been here so many times before.
Your beauty envelops me.
Your simple grace inspires me beyond words.
Your power awes me.
I am timid at first, only gently grazing the tips of you.
I feel my heart beating faster and faster the farther I go.
I know your every inch.
I know your every sound.
I move with such ease.
My heart is pounding inside my chest faster and faster.
You surround me.
All my energy is directed at you.
My heart is thrashing wildly faster and faster and I
 swear the whole world can hear it.
Until, at last, I reach the end and close the lid of my piano.

The Chapel Pigeons

Mark Seely

In circles 'round the chapel belfry arc,
The pigeons' restless flight throws gray shadows
Across the fountain pond, through mirrored dark
Winter skies that warn of cold tomorrows
(Perspective on contemporary sorrows),
On wings that crack like lion tamers' whips,
On wings that drive the wind in sharp staccatos
And ride upon the breath that leaves my lips—
A hazy white penumbra for their brief eclipse.

Without the aid of compass or of speech,
A tight formation stalls, then turns around
With brick and stained glass just beyond their reach,
Caress the ledge and dive toward the ground
Then change direction: left, right, up or down,
Joy found in variation of the dance,
The air is charged by the percussive sound
Of wing-beats pulsing aerial advance—
Complete control of wing and breath and life and
chance.



SJC Chapel

Nathan Plant

Chance With Me

Jennifer Nicole Sherrow

Under the cloudless stary sky,
We dance in harmony
To the magic of music
Eminating from the night,
Radiating from the moment.

With each step,
A flurry of sensations flow,
Reserved by apprehension.
A force of mystic energy
Compel our luring lips.

Without restraining,
Without detaining,
Would you kiss me?

Do not react with reason,
Or consequence in mind.
Rather, act upon emotion,
Evoked from the moment in time.
For love is beyond logical comprehension,
But not beyond emotional perception.
If the moment is pondered,
The chance will pass,
And wonder will prevail.

Under the cloudless stary sky...
A force of mystic energy compel our luring lips.

Without restraining,
Without detaining,
Would you kiss me?

Live in the moment
And Chance with me.

Pesos Fall from Your Lips

Bill White

Pesos fall from your lips

As I see reflections of myself

Drawn to you

By inertia and greed

Thursday

Angela Williams

He said he'd eat the rest
Of my banana split.
I could have finished it—
But he did,
And later puked it all up,
Banana chocolate ice cream fizz
In the bathroom sink.
What waste.
I listened
To his gut wrenching heaves,
With my hands upon my full belly,
Wishing I would puke as well
And rid my body
Of the synthetic fat.
I should have worked out today.
Heave, heave.

The Peach

Amanda Niccum

I am a peach
I was once young
And too green

People plucked me up
Looked me over
Tossed my youngness away

I became bruised
Aged by man's fingers
Feeling so used

Now I'm worthless
Bruised to be brown
I am a peach, tossed in the trash

Freedom

Julia A. Hahn

I walked down the hall between classes,
between hellos and goodbyes – I saw him
running blindly past, parting the sea of
backpacks and sweaters,
a mess of gibberish and tears
huddled in the corner, head between his knees
rocking as he rubbed his scalp and neck
incessantly, as though he could not stop, as though
he were following his thoughts with his fingers
trying to crush them where they were born.
The rest of the lobby stared in shock or pity,
disgusted by the spectacle, yet unable to turn away—
like that six car pile-up I saw on the Parkway last week,
everyone honking and cursing the traffic until their turn
to see the wrecked cars, the overturned semi,
the decapitated woman.
So they stared, embarrassed by their fascination,
relieved it was not them, angry he had
disrupted their day. Indecipherable mummers
meeting only at words like freak and nut job.
And I watched along with them, silent in awe,
knowing this boy was beautiful in his convulsions
and sacred in his suffering,
inspired by the freedom of his hands, blind to the audience
deaf to their condemnation.

And although I never saw his face, I knew he was handsome.
I knew his eyes- thunderous clouds
pouring their rain on his torn jeans.
I knew his wrists—scarred from where he released his poison,
healed before it could all escape.
Yes, I had seen this boy every day of my life,
with longer hair and bigger breasts,
every morning in my bathroom as I
brushed my teeth and washed my face.
And I envied his ability to do what I could not—
to drop the mask and battle the voices
to let hands roam, and tears fall
in a single moment of beauty, of the clarity
mistaken for insanity,
of freedom.

Life Résumé

Breain Ma'Ayteh

Name:

Breain E. Ma'Ayteh

Address:

3445 South Western Boulevard
Chicago, Illinois 60608

Occupation Desired:

Happy human being

Relative Experience:

February 1986

Kelly, my family's German Shepard, had puppies and I got to hold one. I named him Jerry. He was soft and small and brown, and I only had him an hour before he was sold to the hardware man down the block. I learned that even when you love someone, he can still be sold.

September 1990

I tied for first place in the Chicago Public School's "Young Authors' Contest" with a story about a girl who died from eating too many Sweet Tarts. One of the happiest times of my life. It was the day I found out I could be a writer.

June 1995

I fell in love for the first time. It took me five years to find my sanity and fall back out. Had a real thing for his trenchcoat and the mismatched flannels he wore. The bastard took my Beatles CD, 30 dollars and my virginity. Made a mental note to quit being so naive.

August 1998

I started my first year of college and realized there was more to the world than peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and "All My Children." I decided I wanted to be somebody, not quite sure who.

January 2000

I made the Dean's List for the first time, and found out the somebody I was becoming wasn't so bad. I joined the literary club and started treating myself to a Busy Bee banana-split tornado for a week well done.

Accomplishments:

(I am able to...)

eat a medium-sized pizza in less than seven minutes

tie my shoes with eyes closed

change a diaper

set the time on my VCR

change a flat tire without lifting my skirt (on purpose, that is)

finish *Atlas Shrugged* without skipping paragraphs

References:

Mom- She loves me no matter what I do and makes me an apple pie for every late night I have. She'll tell you I'm a girl with a big heart and low self-esteem.

Dad- In between Rolling Rocks he'll tell you that I always feed the hamster when I'm supposed to and never talk back. He'll also say that once in a while, I should.

Kelly- The same German Shepard that birthed Jerry. She'll probably tell you I'm a wonderful person, but that's only because she likes the way I scratch behind her ears. A nice compliment, though, just the same.

Donkey Basketball

Maia Kingman

The poster made him do a double take. He was stopping into Dave's IGA for some milk when he saw it. Donkey Basketball, the poster said.

"Is that right?" he asked the girl at the counter.

"What's that?"

"Donkey Basketball. People playing basketball on donkeys."

"Oh yeah, you should check it out. It's at the high school. They did it last year. It's hilarious."

This sounded like a great idea to him.

"It's people playing basketball on donkeys," he was telling his girlfriend later that day.

"Ooh. On donkeys? we can't miss that," she said. "Let's go."

Tom called a number of friends that week, trying to persuade them to make the drive up to see Donkey Basketball, but there were no takers. The problem was that the game was to be held on a Monday, and kitsch appeal just wasn't enough to make the drive up on a weeknight when everyone had to work the next day. Tom and Anna fancied themselves connoisseurs of kitsch, and they figured donkey basketball was right up their alley.

That Monday they drove to the high school on country roads that wound between cornfields and little country gas stations. They were new to this particular town, though they were both familiar with small, Indiana towns, having both grown up in them. This was country they understood.

"Not a parking spot to be found," Tom said as they circled the parking lot. "Let's park on the street. Boy, look at this crowd." He wasn't talking about numbers anymore. He was talking about the cast of characters. There were grandmotherly looking women in stars and stripes jumpsuits. There were faded, middle aged couples with feathered bangs and tight jeans. There were men with unreasonably large mustaches and belt buckles. And there were kids. Lots and lots of

kids. Running. Shrieking. It was a veritable kaleidoscope of small town Midwest America.

Tom and Anna were giddy as they ran toward the gymnasium. They were always giddy when they shared small adventures. Things were good between them, but like any couple settling into a routine of living together, they were struggling with the mundane quality of day to day life together. They thought of themselves as happy mostly. Yet there were times . . .

They had been looking forward to this night out. They were ready to laugh.

"My goodness, look at the line." Anna tucked herself under his arm, feeling carefree.

* * * * *

Inside the crowded high school they bought their tickets and negotiated their way toward the gymnasium. Being in a rural high school enhanced their mood, because it flooded both of them with their own memories. Tom was thinking he could almost see Bobby Alexander rounding the corner on his way to basketball practice. Anna was trying to remember her locker combination, which brought to mind the picture of Derrick Johnson that hung inside her locker door. They were practically running now. They passed through a narrow hallway, weaving in and out of people and back through time. They emerged into the crowded gymnasium, restored momentarily to the present.

There was a sea of people in the stands. "Let's sit over there." He pointed to an empty row near the top of the bleachers at the far end of the gym. He was having a great time, laughing and raising his eyebrows at her.

They found some space and sat down. They took turns commenting upon the crowd, individual spectators, the band, the absence of their friends, high school memories. They had just begun discussing their upcoming ten year high school reunions when the emcee appeared, rolling out onto the gym floor on a wooden donkey on wheels. He wore a sombrero and a serape. The crowd cheered.

"Ladies and gentlemen," the announcer began, "welcome to this year's Donkey Basketball Tournament. Let's meet our first two teams!" As he spoke, the teams walked onto the gym floor from the side doors, donkeys in tow.

"Oh my god," Anna said, but Tom was just laughing. They were both thinking that, somehow, the idea of donkeys in a gym was much different than the actuality of donkeys in a gym. The sight seemed more utterly incongruent than they had anticipated.

"As I introduce each team member," the emcee was saying, "would you please raise your hand so we can tell the donkeys from the asses." Tom and Anna rolled their eyes at each other. The announcer introduced the first two teams: area entrepreneurs versus the high school seniors. The entrepreneurs were dressed in no-nonsense red t-shirts and hardhats. The seniors were decked out in tie dye t-shirts. The senior women had tucked their hair back into bandannas and looked like aspiring hippies. The senior men had decorated themselves with warpaint, including dark lines under their eyes and messages on their arms. "Look at that guy," said Tom. "Do you think 'Franis' was supposed to spell 'Francis?' As in the talking donkey?"

"Oops. How embarrassing," Anna laughed. "Look at that guy wearing camouflage pants and a Confederate flag face mask. He's kind of a walking contradiction wearing a tie-dye t-shirt, isn't he?" Tom laughed.

When the announcer had introduced the second two teams, the city council versus the high school teachers, he paused. "And now," he intoned dramatically, "I have the pleasure of introducing this year's participants in the Miss Donkey pageant."

"Oh, no." Tom was sniggering at the idea. "What hilarity is about to ensue?" he mused aloud. The announcer called for contestant number one, and a garish, gangly male high school student in drag sashayed clumsily across the gym floor. The crowd hollered and barked as the band played a bit of "The Stripper" so that the contestant could show off her goods. When she had been adequately introduced, the announcer called the other contenders out onto the floor one by one.

Each new contestant was worse than the last. The boy was bulkier, the heels built higher, the skirt cut shorter, the fake tits bigger, the nipples more pronounced. In the bleachers, fathers and grandfathers laughed, mothers and grandmothers hooted, the chamber of commerce applauded, teachers smiled approvingly, and children unconsciously learned that gender roles are rigorously circumscribed, Anna thought. Her skin burned. She took a deep breath. It's okay, she thought to herself. Don't let this ruin your night.

* * * * *

But the reality of Donkey Basketball was difficult for her to appreciate. To win the game players had to dismount their donkeys and drag the animals across the court to retrieve loose balls. Pudgy bankers and muscled teenagers repeatedly mounted tired backs and dug their heels into weary sides. Slaps on thighs and impatient prodding moved the impassive and frankly unimpressed animals up and down the court. The competition was clearly between, not the two teams, but the players and their chattel, who often bucked or refused to move in protest. Often, a donkey would lower her front end to the floor to force her cargo off of her back.

But who could win this war of wills but the humans? After all, these animals had been bought for the evening, Anna thought. They belonged to us. We had paid good money to bend them to our will for our amusement. She knew Tom would tell her she was overreacting, but really, the whole thing was rather brutish. More brutish than funny.

Meanwhile, the pageant contestants moved in and out of the crowd. The most incongruous-looking figures seemed to be receiving the most approval. A scrawny, androgynous-looking teenager was hardly attracting any notice. The crowd was encouraged to vote by the sombreroed and seraped announcer. Anna nudged Tom to get his attention. "Tom, this just struck me. Look around at who is participating. This is the town's intelligencia," she said, "the ones with book or business smarts. The role models. These are the folks who said, 'Donkey Basketball?' That's a good idea!"

He laughed and nodded his head. He pointed the local librarian, struggling to get back on her donkey. It was funny, and Anna laughed, but only halfheartedly. She realized she was going to have to stay somewhat detached from the scene in front of her if she was to stay in a good mood. She tried to figure out what it was exactly that bothered her about the event. It wasn't so much the violence with which the animals were being treated, although that was definitely part of it. It was more that the evening seemed to stand for everything she hated about the Midwest. And here it was, built into a public pageant of sorts. A carnival of bad values. "If we had a kid whose school hosted Donkey Basketball, I don't think I would want the kid to participate." She thought about it for a minute. "Actually, I think I would have to confront the school board or something. This whole thing kind of bothers me."

She spoke too quickly—before she could think better of it. As soon as she said it, there was a slight shift in feeling, which would have been imperceptible to anyone but Tom and Anna. It was as if they had begun receiving data on a different frequency.

Tom turned slightly to face her. "Are you for real?"

Anna heard the tone in his voice, but what she really noticed was his facial expression, his posture. She had seen this body language before. She translated those visual clues to mean he was feeling encroached upon, but if she was honest with herself, she really had no idea what he was thinking. "Yeah," she said quietly but firmly, "I am absolutely for real."

"Wow." To anyone watching, that conversation would have appeared to have been over, but Tom and Anna were both continuing the dialogue in their heads. It was a conversation they had had so many times, about so many different things, in so many different contexts, they both felt they could guess where the discussion might go and what might be said. Thick silence unrolled and curled itself around them in waves and peaks. Their thoughts quickly turned to salvaging the mirth that had tied them together a moment ago. Why spoil a good evening?

* * * * *

They passed through the doorway out of the gymnasium as the throng of spectators hurried about them in every direction. They stopped short, their way barred by a confused mass of flesh and fists. A couple of knee-high blond boys were locked in battle, and the kid on top was pummeling the kid on bottom with tiny fists. The violence was mediated by the fact that both kids were laughing. "Oh my god!" laughed Anna, in part to relieve nervous tension. She turned to Tom, who was also laughing and putting his arm around her. A woman ran toward the kids and pulled one blonde off the other. "Now stop it, you two," she said.

* * * * *

"So you can't see it as just funny?" They were driving home. Tom was driving fast and Anna was focusing on the road ahead.

"Just because things are funny doesn't mean they don't express values."

"I know, it's just that . . . we see things so differently." He had said it. The thing they were both really thinking. What he wouldn't ask is how two people so different are to reconcile their differences. It was a big enough challenge for her to consider when it was just the two of them. What if there were children as well? What would happen when there was something at stake for them besides their own willful sense of autonomy and pride?

She saw her reflection in the car window as she looked out over farmland and prairie, and she tried to focus on the nightscape outdoors. Open fields of the highway countryside were interrupted by an occasional house and utility light, like constellations on the ground. She had spent countless hours gazing out of the window like this as a child in her parents' car, travelling home on country highways. She had often pondered those houses, radiating light. They were such specters of contentment. The glow of a happy home. She used to try to imagine what it would feel like to be inside one of those homes. Sometimes, if she concentrated hard enough, she could lose herself, staring out into a starry sky, over those open fields and warm homes. She could forget she was looking through a window and she

was out there, floating free in the night skies.

Tom was talking to her, saying something about professional basketball. He must have been trying to change the subject, but she could only dimly hear his voice, like a wave rolling in and rolling out.

And then she was floating up and away from the car. Out over the miles of open field and prairie.

The wind felt good and she felt so clean. She remembered herself and tried to look in on the car. There she was, and there was Tom, like their own constellation, individual stars held together by a trick of the mind. An imposed meaning on a collection of objects in space.

She was snapped back into herself by the sound of rapid deceleration and screeching tires. Tom was saying "Oh, shit, hold on." Her entire self became instantly focused on the road in front of her. There was sound and movement and light and then—

A small, gray bunny hopped nervously away from the car, like a sheepish dancer in the spotlight.

They were so happy not to have hit the bunny and were so amused by its smallness and were so relieved to be okay and were so delighted something had broken the tension that they laughed long and loudly.

God, Anna thought, his light is so bright. She could see him glowing. She knew she was glowing too.

When the laughing died down, she said, "Baby, if I ever stage a protest of donkey basketball, I expect you to rally the opposition. You could make t-shirts that say 'We're for donkeys! Those other guys are just asses.'" "You've got it," he laughed.

"Buy me a drink?" she asked, smiling. Her stomach fluttered and somersaulted with life. Things were going to be alright.

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Measure
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